

Making A Living

There's going to be a change in the way American Jews make a living.

That's why it's so timely that the San Francisco Jewish Welfare Federation has set up a Jewish Vocational Service which will open its doors shortly.

To begin with, the relative concentration of Jews in the professions is going to diminish. Proportionately, there will be fewer Jewish lawyers, doctors, teachers and social workers.

The occupational pattern of Jews in America has changed before, of course. But it's always changed in a certain direction. In 1900, the average Jewish immigrant landed in this country with about nine dollars in his pocket. That was about half of the average for other immigrants. But the Jewish immigrant landed with a higher degree of skills. In the first decade of this century, about two-thirds of the Jewish immigrants were classified as "skilled," as against less than one-fifth of the Italian and Irish immigrants. These were manual skills, of course. In 1900, the proportion of foreign born Jews in tailoring was 24 times higher than the rest of the American working class.



Raab

In addition, the immigrant Jew had greater experience with primitive commercial enterprise than did his fellow immigrant. In 1900, the proportion of foreign born Jews working as hucksters or peddlers was 20 times higher than the rest of the American working class, and almost that much higher than the rest of the immigrant working class.

But the pattern of the Jews began to change swiftly. In one generation the concentration of hucksters and peddlers dropped five-fold while the concentration of salesmen rose four-fold; the concentration of tailors dropped three-fold while the concentration of clerks rose four-fold. Many of the foreign born managed to go into small business for themselves, with the advantage of their special background. Their sons and younger brothers and sisters either followed them into their business or, having become educated, moved into white-collar occupations—and then, into the professions.

Education was the key. All you needed was the motivation, and education, in order to move upwards in America. The Jews had a head start on most other immigrant groups with respect to both motivation and educational tradition. That gap is now closing. In 1900, only four out of every 100 college-age Americans were enrolled in college; by 1930 it was only up to 12 out of 100. By that year about four times as many Jews as the rest of the population were enrolled in college, proportionately. Today, the Jews have just about reached the limit of college attendance, over 80 percent, while the college attendance of other Americans has risen sharply, and will soon be at the 60 percent mark.

Of course, something else has happened at the same time. Partly because of the saturation, college is becoming less rather than more important vocationally. There are more people with college degrees than there are jobs which require college degrees. There is probably a disproportion of unemployed 21 year old Jewish college graduates around. And the number who wander into San Francisco Jewish agencies looking for some kind of semi-professional work has certainly increased in the past few years.

There's been a change in the business world, too. Small business has been out for a long time as a road to easy success. And family business, large or small, has been disappearing into the maw of the corporations. But Jews have traditionally made their way in family businesses, not in corporations.

In short, the Jew has been accustomed to moving in certain traditional occupational channels, which are no longer going to be available in the same way. It may be difficult to recognize the Jewish community, occupationally, a half century from now—which is as distant as we are now from the end of mass immigration. And some special vocational guidance seems called for at this period, which is what we're about to get in San Francisco.